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ABSTRACT

Publicity techniques for reaching commuter students are presented in this article. Following a discussion of the special problems associated with reaching commuter students with information, the difference between promotion, advertising, and publicity is explained. Publicity strategies are then provided for: (1) reaching adult students; (2) reaching evening students; (3) holding promotional events; (4) using the news media; and (5) designing posters, flyers, and ads. A list of inexpensive resources on publicity is included. (DC)

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Peddling programs

Getting the message across

The best laid plans for programming can be a waste of time if they are not matched by equally careful publicity efforts. If a potential audience consists of commuter students, the difficulty is compounded. Commuter students often complain about arriving on campus too early or too late to get a copy of the campus newspaper. They also may miss bulletin boards in such standard locations as dining halls, residence halls, and even the student union. How can the commuter student be reached? There is no one sure-fire method so a multifaceted approach is probably the most reliable.

Barry Bonifas (1978) draws some useful distinctions between promotion, advertising, and publicity. Promotion is an overall plan — a marketing strategy — for an organization's events, which may include package deals, give-aways and contests, or previews of events. Advertising refers only to paid media coverage including billboards, newspaper ads, and radio spots. Publicity encompasses all other strategies which are not paid for directly: newspaper stories, posters and flyers, public service announcements, or town criers. Most colleges' efforts are concentrated in the free or low-cost alternatives, but sometimes one needs to "spend money to make money" (or ensure a turnout).

Publicity efforts aimed at commuter students must reach them where they are. Ken Kelly (1981) at George Mason University administered a survey, the results of which demonstrated that returning adults overwhelmingly preferred to receive information in the mail so they could evaluate the information and try to fit it into their busy schedules if it seemed worthwhile; a monthly calendar format has worked well. This data justified the higher costs associated with mailing because of the method's effectiveness. Radio spots are a good bet for capturing the attention of commuters who drive to work, and most stations offer public service announcements to non-profit organizations. Buses, subways and trains all display posters for those who commute by mass transit.

Publicity on campus should be determined by traffic patterns of commuters, which may be markedly different from those of residents. If there is a particular hangout for commuters, one can develop a bulletin board aimed at them and screened to include only items of particular interest. Libraries and classroom buildings are good spots for flyers. Some schools have had success with lucite covered boards in parking lots, and others have hired students to put flyers under windshield wipers. Evening students, who often only come to campus, attend class, and leave again, are even more difficult to reach. John Desiderio (1977) suggest some special techniques to reach this population.

1. Lighted signboards at entrances to campus, smaller ones along walkways.
2. Easels in foyers of classroom buildings.
3. Flyers left in classrooms or distributed by willing evening instructors.
4. Promotionals such as ashtrays, buttons, cards, etc., distributed near vending machines.
5. Class breaks used by program board members to make announcements or hand out promotionals.

Small promotional events can attract more attention than more passive publicity. A 15-minute noontime preview of a musical event, costumed students handing out flyers and actively soliciting participants, balloons and buttons with messages; all of these are relatively low-cost, magnetic, and portable. If specific subpopulations on campus can be expected to be particularly interested in a certain program, promotional efforts can be directed at them.

On most campuses it is worthwhile to identify an editor and reporter on the campus newpaper who are also concerned about commuter students. It also makes sense to make contact within local newspapers, but these people cannot be expected to be as interested in campus stories as the school newspeople. Some suggestions for a good liaison with journalists adapted from Scott Walker's handbook, "Tips on Publicity," are:

1. Get to know editors and reporters personally.
2. Make sure the event is newsworthy.
3. Look for new angles in publicizing annual events.
4. Never give fake, dishonest, or inaccurate information. If this occurs inadvertently, call the editor to correct it.
5 Don't be disappointed if the copy is edited -- that's what editors are for.
6. Don't ask an editor to run a story as a favor. If it is newsworthy it will run. If it does run, there's no need to thank the editor; it was run because it was newsworthy.
7. Use campus moods or issues as a springboard for effective stories.
8. If an error appears in the published story, call the appropriate editor who will usually have a correction printed.

The design of posters, flyers, and ads deserves a professional touch. Brierly (1978) suggests that poorly prepared publicity may cause the reader to question the credibility of the event and its sponsor. Most campuses have graphic arts services, but art or design students may be willing to prepare your publicity for the experience or for a modest fee. Using transfer lettering such as Press-type, Geotype, or Letraset produces professional looking results for a minimal cost.

Several inexpensive resources can help one learn to get messages across more effectively:

Publications available from ACUCAA (Association of College University, and Community Arts Administrators), P.O. Box 2137 Madison, WI 53701. Michaelis, Donald. "Divergent Views on Promoting the Performing Arts." $1 Dekorte, J. Marc, "Pricing the Product." $1 Saltzman, Estelle, and Runyon, Jean. "No Cost PR." $1 Taylor, Fannie and Goldbery, Michael. "Publicity and Promotion," $1, Willis, Jerry. "The Ticket Office as a Public Relations and Event Promotion Asset." $1.

If You Want Air Time, 1977. National Association of Broadcasters, 1771 N. Street, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20036. Single copies free, multiple copies 25 cents each.

Pocket Pal: A Graphic Arts Production Handbook. 1974. International Paper Company, P.O. Box 100, Church Street Station, New York, New York 10046. $2.25

Publicity Handbook, 1976. Consumer Services, The Sperry and Hutchinson Company, 2900 West Seminary Drive, Fort Worth, TX 76133. 25 cents.

Simon, Bernard. **Publicity Releases: How to Prepare and Submit Them**, 1967. Package Publicity Service, 1501 Broadway, Suite 1314, New York, NY 10036. 35 cents plus shipping.

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Bonifas, B. "Promotion, Publicity, and Advertising for Campus Activities." **Student Activities Programming**, August-September, pp. 25-27, 1978.

Brierly, J. "Simplify Your Message for Effective Promotion." **Student Activities Programming**, August-September, pp. 37-39, 1978,

Desiderio, J. "Publicity and Promotional Programming for the Evening Student.' Clearinghouse Files, Unpublished Manuscript, 1977.

Walker, S. "Tips on Publicity." Washington, D.C.: National Training and Development Service for State and Local Government.